

North Korea: Human Rights Ground Zero: Suzanne Scholte Prepared Testimony

January 27, 2004 Thank you for giving me the honor of testifying before you today. I wish to express my deep appreciation to you on behalf of the North Korean defectors, refugees and humanitarian organizations with whom we closely work, for your continuing focus on this evil regime. Human Rights situation in North Korea: Our Foundation hosted the first North Korean defectors to speak publicly in the United States, Colonel Joo Hwal Choi and diplomat Young Hwan Ko back in 1997. Since then we have hosted a steady stream of defectors including survivors of the political prisoner camps: Soon Ok Lee, Chul Hwan Kang, Myung Chul Ahn and Hae Nam Ji. These defectors confirmed what we had long suspected: North Korea is a land of horrible repression and evil with no human rights or freedom for its citizens. It is a regime intolerant of any religious faith because everyone is to worship Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong il and abide by the juche ideology in a twisted perversion of the Holy Trinity. Anyone with religious beliefs is considered a counter-revolutionary. Soon Ok Lee testified about the horrible conditions in the political prisoner camps, but she also pointed out that the worst treatment was always given to the Christians for daring to have another God before them. What was also disturbing about their testimonies was how this regime taught their children to vehemently hate us. Colonel Choi described the standard children's math book which included equations where the child would add up how many American GIs had been killed by grenades. Americans were shocked by 9-11. We found it hard to believe that people could hate us so much. Yet, this is precisely how totalitarian regimes operate: they hate freedom, democracy, and the free expression of ideas. And the war on terrorism is precisely a war over those ideals. David Hawk and Roger Winter have addressed the issues of the political prison camps, which instill a terrible fear among the people, and the food crisis - two methods used by this regime to maintain power. This regime also maintains power through controlling access to any information, isolating the North Korean people from the rest of the world. By controlling access to food, Kim Jong-il has caused the refugee crisis by using food as a weapon against his own people. It is almost beyond human comprehension to imagine the cruelty of the Kim Jong-il regime, but let me describe one incident that illustrates the reach of this regime. UNICEF donated two tons of high energy formula to an orphanage in Chongjin to save the lives of severely malnourished children. When Action Against Hunger visited the orphanage two months later the children were being fed watered down goats milk -- the formula was gone. These starving babies had never received any of the high energy formula that had been donated for them. We hear stories like this again and again from humanitarian organizations who are denied access to the most vulnerable population while finding donated items on sale in Pyongyang and other markets. By my most conservative estimates Kim Jong il each day kills 42 children and adults in his political prison camps and 391 children and adults by intentionally starving them to death. These estimates are based on universally accepted figures, but I fear this figure is three or four times higher. In other words, during this hearing he will have killed 35 more innocent men, women and children, but possibly over one hundred. What Refugees Face and China's Policy As if the North Korean people have not suffered enough, what they face in China is another horror. China puts a price on their heads and it rewards its own citizens for turning them in, while jailing humanitarian workers. Can you imagine a situation in the world today where on the one hand, you have starving, desperate, homeless people and on the other hand, organizations whose only purpose is to feed and shelter starving, desperate, homeless people being terrorized just for trying to find each other? This is the policy of China, which regards itself as a world leader, yet is committing one of the most despicable crimes against humanity in the world today. Over the years, field surveys conducted by human rights organizations* documented that over 50% of North Korean women have been subjected to human trafficking, sold as wives to Chinese farmers, sold as sex slaves to brothels, and sexually exploited. These statistics are now believed to be as high as 70 to 90%, because now it is not just Chinese that are selling North Korean women and young girls but even desperate North Koreans are selling their own citizens. Tim Peters of Helping Hands Korea believes that at least 70% and possibly 90% of North Korean refugee females have been victimized by trafficking. He described one such victim, Kim Mi-Soon. Kim's parents died and she was left to fend for herself until a woman from a nearby town offered to take Kim to China to live with her relatives. She went gratefully. It was not until she reached China that she discovered the deception: the woman sold her to a Chinese man. She was sexually abused, beaten and treated like a piece of property. Despite the abuse, Kim considers herself very fortunate, because she will tell you: "I was only sold once. Most of the teenage girls from my home town, 15 and 16 year olds have been sold 3 and 4 times as sex slaves." Many of these young women are terrified to come forward to tell their stories because of the stigma that they have to live with for the abuse they endured. Hae Nam Ji is another example. She decided to flee North Korea after she served time in a political prison camp for the "crime" of singing a South Korean song. Ji describes the several times she was sold. In one case the man who bought her was afraid she would try to escape while he was at work, so he took her to the factory where she was treated like an animal in a zoo, stared at and sexually molested by the man's co-workers. Despite these horror stories pouring out of China, China continues to repatriate North Korean refugees and denies UNHCR access to them. I am submitting a paper prepared by Tarik Radwan, an attorney with Jubilee Campaign, which outlines the violations by the PRC regarding these refugees. China also jails humanitarian workers. There are over 10 of these workers in jail today, and I would like to describe just two of them -- Rev. Dong Shik Kim who disappeared on January 16, 2000, and Takayuki Noguchi who was seized on December 10, 2003, last month. Rev. Kim is a devout Christian who despite his own handicap and treatment for colon cancer has worked in China with the disabled as well as organized humanitarian shipments to Pyongyang. He was helping shelter refugees in China when on January 16, 2000, he was visited by three men who told them they wanted to take him to a North Korean refugee couple. After serving the three men lunch, the three men took Rev. Kim away and he has not been seen since. Noguchi of Life Funds for North Korean Refugees** was seized on December 10 with two Japanese born North Korean refugees. Noguchi is being held by Chinese authorities for the crime of "illegally transporting people to cross the border." Even if Japan secures his

release, he has stated they he will not leave China without the two North Korean refugees he was helping. I am submitting a list to the Commission of the refugees and humanitarian workers that have been seized by the Chinese. To the government of China, this list is of "economic migrants" and "lawbreakers", to the free world, this is a list of refugees and the heroes of our time who with extraordinary self-sacrifice risks their own lives and health by trying to save the suffering. U.S. Policy Towards Refugees

Now what about the United States of America? How are we responding to one of the worst human rights tragedies of our time. On May 8, 2002, Song, Yong-Bum and Choi, Kwang-cheol, entered the American Consulate in Shenyang, China, and requested to seek political asylum in the United States. The two men had been hiding in China for some time and had the opportunity to "surf the internet" to learn more about other countries. They decided that America was the place for them with its great freedom and opportunity. Once inside the American consulate, they asked for political asylum in the USA. Our response was to tell them to go to South Korea instead. They refused and went on a hunger strike demanding to be allowed to defect to the USA. Our embassy officials threatened to hand them over to the Chinese police. They held fast. Our embassy in Beijing dispatched a Korean American embassy staffer to Shenyang who badgered them: "Why do you want to go to the United States? They don't even speak your language. You should go to South Korea where you get automatic citizenship." They held fast. Finally, the stand-off was broken when the defectors were led to believe they were going to another city to meet UNHCR officials to apply for political asylum in the USA. When they arrived in Singapore, they were turned over to South Korean officials. They realized the U.S. officials had tricked them. It is no coincidence that on July 4 of last year, four teenagers from North Korea entered the British consulate in Shanghai to defect to the USA. These four teenagers were being helped by Edward Kim of Orange County, editor of the Chosun Journal. Edward had arranged for people, including his own parents, to adopt these teenagers and three churches agreed to help sponsor them in America. They just had to get here. On the birth day of our nation, Kim Guang-il, a 17 year old boy, Kim Eun-Ok a 19 year old girl, Choe Il, a 16 year old boy, and Im Eun-Hong, a 17 year old girl entered the British consulate, carrying in their hands letters to President Bush. Kim wrote, "Dear President of America: I want to live in a country where I know I am safe even in my dreams." Lim wrote: "Even though I know that someone like me couldn't mean much to you, I'm hesitantly writing you this letter because I believe I am also a creation of God. I desperately want to go to America....and watch my dreams blossom like a flower. I am currently in the British consulate. I will be awaiting your reply." Our reply? The British informed them that there was no option to go to the U.S. The four teenagers were turned over to South Korean authorities. Fortunately, Congressman Ed Royce has launched an inquiry into this incident. Out of frustration for the failure of the U.S. to respond to the tragic circumstances facing North Korean refugees, Senators Sam Brownback and Ted Kennedy, and Congressmen Henry Hyde proposed legislation that simply stated for purposes of political asylum North Korean refugees would not be considered citizens of South Korea. There have been many other initiatives in Congress including hearings in the Senate Foreign Relations, Senate Judiciary, and House International Relations Committees and the Congressional Human Rights Caucus to focus attention on the human rights tragedy that is North Korea. Senator Jon Kyl introduced the North Korean Democracy Act last year which called for cutting off aid to Kim Jong-il's regime, increasing Radio Free Asia broadcasting, and assisting the refugees. Congressmen Chris Smith, Frank Wolf and Joseph Pitts introduced a resolution asking for the US to work for passage of the condemnation of North Korea before the UN Commission on Human Rights, and Congressmen Ed Royce sponsored a resolution that passed unanimously in support of increased Radio Free Asia broadcasting. Congressman Chris Cox has recommended a policy of temporary first asylum for refugees. Senators Sam Brownback and Evan Bayh and Congressmen Jim Leach and Eni Faleomavaega have introduced the North Korean Freedom Act which encompasses many of these policy recommendations.

In Conclusion: Policy Recommendations

My personal opinion is that Kim Jong-il is the worst violator of human rights in the world today. His crimes are far worse than Saddam Hussein if you look at the numbers he has killed, his involvement in kidnapping Japanese and South Korean citizens, his international drug trafficking and counterfeiting, his proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. There are many ways that we can address this situation. The first most important way is to make human rights a part of our North Korea policy and recognize that the nuclear issue and the human rights issue are the two sides of the same coin. The same regimes that terrorize the world, terrorize their own people. Human rights and nuclear proliferation are intrinsically linked, but all we ever focus on is the nuclear issue as if anyone born north of the 38th parallel does not deserve the same human rights as the rest of the world. We should also pressure China to stop their repatriations or face an economic boycott cut off all government to government food aid to North Korea unless we are allowed to see it consumed tie food aid to the shutting down of the political prisoner camps establish refugee camps work with our allies to grant first asylum status to all North Korean refugees increase the broadcasting of Radio Free Asia and Voice of America bombard North Korea with information: radios, newspapers, magazines pressure the Olympic Committee to change their venue for the 2008 Olympics unless China stop's its inhumane policy and most importantly, pass the North Korean Freedom Act. I conclude with a plea to: "Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter, does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done." Thank you.

 *Citizens Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, Good Friends, and the Commission to Help North Korean Refugees.
 **Life Funds for North Korean Refugees is an outstanding Japanese NGO that has been helping shelter and rescue refugees.
 ***Proverbs 24: 11-12

Suzanne Scholte is President of the Defense Forum Foundation, the U.S. partner of the Citizens Alliance for North Korean Human Rights and the Society to Help Returnees to North Korea. She is also a Founding Board Member of the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea and a Founding Member and Advisor of the North Korea Freedom Coalition. In addition to raising awareness of the human rights issues in North Korea, DFF has also established the Sin U

Nam Fund in which 100% of the donations are used to rescue refugees and provide support to NGOs sheltering refugees.